

REPLACE THE PRISON



WHY PRISONS

Aside from their practical use as aides to capitalism and systemic racism in the U.S., prisons theoretically serve a few beneficial purposes for society:

PUNISHMENT

INCAPACITATION

DETERRENCE

For many, it is common sense that people who commit crimes should be punished. However, aside from the arguments that laws can be unjust and are created by those in power to control certain populations (Gilmore 12), punishment is still not always justified. In a theoretical world where we could otherwise guarantee that someone will not commit a crime again and any victims have been repaid, is there really a need to further punish the individual? From at least a utilitarian perspective, only pain is being inflicted on the punished, without any healthy utility for anyone else.

Incapacitation is often used as a punishment itself in prisons, but there is further motivation for incapacitation. It would benefit society to take genuinely dangerous individuals that are likely to harm themselves or others and hold them somewhere they can be less of a threat. Prisons clearly serve this purpose, but perhaps there could be more humane ways of holding people that truly focus on rehabilitation back into society such as drug rehab, community service, or at least well-funded mental asylums. Finally, one of the most touted benefits of prisons is that their threat acts as a deterrent to crime. This is factually untrue, and the U.S. National Institute of Justice has found that

"prisons actually may have the **opposite effect**: Persons who are incarcerated learn more effective crime strategies from each other, and time spent in prison **may desensitize many** to the threat of future imprisonment" ("Five Things About Deterrence").



Since prisons are not working to stop crimes with fear, we should instead focus on building a world where people do not want to commit crimes. The next few pages will go in-depth into just some of the many systemic changes that can actually prevent crimes and replace prisons.

DRUG POLICY

One easy target for justice reform is to separate the handling of drug abuse from prisons. The criminalization of drugs was heavily exacerbated by Nixon and Reagan's War on Drugs campaign in the late 1900s. Prison (or punishment in general) is, however, not a helpful way to deal with addictive substances that users often have little control over. The state of Oregon used this reasoning to decriminalize small possession of certain hard drugs (Westervelt). It ended up being successful in getting people with addiction on the pathway to the medical help they needed. The main drawback was a lack of strong healthcare infrastructure to actually provide the attention needed to the influx of drug abuse cases. Overall, it is a strong step towards reducing the swollen and racist prison system, and redirecting funding from punishment towards rehabilitation.



HEALTHCARE

Another system to put into place is strong physical and mental health infrastructure. Improved healthcare will both help resolve the drug problems that often lead to incarceration (like as discussed previously about Oregon), while additionally addressing the issues of mental health more effectively

Further, the U.S.
Department of Justice

“about **37 percent** of people in prison have a history of mental health problems” (qtd. in Stringer 46).



Many of these people may have been less likely to end up in prison if they instead got the mental health they needed. Or at the very least, a punitive prison system will likely not provide them with the help to manage their mental health problems. Here, universal access to affordable healthcare is clearly a preferable alternative to locking away these struggling individuals.



PERESTROIKA

(ECONOMIC REFORM)

A different approach to decrease crime is through economic reform creating more economically fair societies. An Oklahoma justice reform advocate group gathered research showing that some of the greatest contributors to violent crime and especially property crime are *poverty and income inequality* ("How Poverty Drives Violent Crime").

Poverty can lead to crimes out of desperation to survive, and income inequality can lead to frustration that could turn into crime. By implementing policies such as increasing taxes on the wealthy, democratizing the workplace, or increasing social welfare, we can reduce poverty and income inequality. Thus, crime (and subsequently the need for prisons) would decrease with it.

